

Violent Video Games Draw SC Fire

Suffolk County government would try to curtail the appearance here of video games "which promote various violent criminal acts," under bills advanced by three county legislators.

The resolutions are both to be voted on at the next meeting of the county legislature, Tuesday in Hauppauge.

One bill introduced by the three, all Democrats, would have the county's consumer affairs commissioner "develop appropriate guidelines of acceptability for video games offered for sale in Suffolk County" and present these to "businesses engaged in the distribution, lease, or sale of video games, in an effort to promote voluntary compliance with the standards established by these guidelines."

Another bill would empower the county attorney to take action to stop the sale or distribution of video games which are "an imminent danger to the health and safety of Suffolk County citizens."

Legislators Philip Nolan, John Foley and Jane Devine are specifically upset about two new video games: "Custer's Revenge" and "Firebug."

In Custer's Revenge, the player must maneuver an electronic version of General George Armstrong Custer through a maze of obstacles in order that he can rape an Indian woman.

In Firebug, the player must move an arsonist through a building which is to be set on fire with gasoline from cans depicted on the video screen, and then have the arsonist escape. The video screen flashes, "Thank you for a nice fire," to a winner.

Representatives of the National Organization for Women and the Victims Information Bureau of Suffolk complained at a recent press conference organized by Mr. Nolan about Custer's Revenge.

Representatives of the Suffolk County Volunteer Firemen's Association protested Firebug.

Mr. Nolan, at the press conference, declared that "rape and arson are not games."

The bill he and the other two legislators drafted which calls for industry "guidelines of acceptability" for video games charges that "video games which promote violent criminal acts create an atmosphere in which such

crimes appear to be socially acceptable pursuits."

The second resolution, providing for the county attorney to take action, notes that Custer's Revenge and Firebug "are either currently being sold, or are scheduled for sale in Suffolk County before Christmas."

Kenneth Rosenblum, Suffolk's commissioner of consumer affairs, said in an interview that "in any effort to ban or regulate any

kind of speech or expression, there are the most serious kind of First Amendment problems." These difficulties, said Mr. Rosenblum, an attorney, "people have learned about over the years when they tried to ban certain movies for having a strongly sexual or violent content."

He said that video games "have First Amendment protection" and he was thus concerned about any move through legislation to bar objectionable ones.

Meanwhile, said Mr. Rosenblum, the county's Consumer Affairs Advisory Board last week began discussing the video game issue and "came up with an interesting idea of having different approaches taken for games available in public arcades, taverns and delis, and those only for home use."

The board, he said, would have the video game industry establish a "rating system" for its games, "similar to that of the Motion Pic-

ture Association," and those "video games which portray graphic violence or have a specific sexual content," could have the equivalent of an R or X rating.

In any case, said Mr. Rosenblum, "we may be on the threshold of a whole new era in home entertainment. And as far as I know, we in Suffolk County are the first in government to try to come to grips with something which may be a significant national issue in the near future."